

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

ELLIOT MCGUCKEN, an individual,

Plaintiff,

v.

NEWSWEEK LLC, a New York Limited  
Liability Company; and DOES 1-10,  
inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.:

**COMPLAINT FOR:**

1. COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT
2. VICARIOUS AND/OR  
CONTRIBUTORY COPYRIGHT  
INFRINGEMENT

**JURY TRIAL DEMANDED**

Plaintiff, Elliot McGucken (“McGucken”) by and through his undersigned attorneys, hereby prays to this honorable Court for relief based on the following:

**JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

1. This action arises under the Copyright Act of 1976, Title 17 U.S.C., § 101 *et seq.*
2. This Court has federal question jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 1338 (a) and (b).
3. Venue in this judicial district is proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(c) and 1400(a) in that this is the judicial district in which a substantial part of the acts and omissions giving rise to the claims occurred.

**PARTIES**

4. McGucken is an individual residing in Los Angeles County.
5. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendant NEWSWEEK LLC (“NEWSWEEK”) is a New York limited liability company with its principal place of business located at 7 Hanover Square 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10004 and is doing business in the State of California.
6. Defendants DOES 1 through 10, inclusive, are other parties not yet identified who have infringed Plaintiff’s copyrights, have contributed to the infringement of Plaintiff’s copyrights, or have engaged in one or more of the wrongful practices alleged herein. The true names, whether corporate, individual or otherwise, of Defendants 1 through 10, inclusive, are presently unknown to Plaintiff, who therefore sues said Defendants by such fictitious names, and will seek leave to amend this Complaint to show their true names and capacities when same have been ascertained.

7. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that at all times relevant hereto each of the Defendants was the agent, affiliate, officer, director, manager, principal, alter-ego, and/or employee of the remaining Defendants and was at all times acting within the scope of such agency, affiliation, alter-ego relationship and/or employment; and actively participated in or subsequently ratified and adopted, or both, each and all of the acts or conduct alleged, with full knowledge of all the facts and circumstances, including, but not limited to, full knowledge of each and every violation of Plaintiff's rights and the damages to Plaintiff proximately caused thereby.

#### **CLAIMS RELATED TO MCGUCKEN'S PHOTOGRAPHS**

8. McGucken created and owns a certain nature photograph ("Subject Photograph") that he published on his Instagram account. The Subject Photograph is set forth in **Exhibit A** hereto.

9. Plaintiff has registered the Subject Photograph and has complied with all necessary formalities.

10. Plaintiff's investigation revealed that NEWSWEEK published and hosted a post on its website(s) that incorporated an unauthorized copy of the Subject Photograph (the "Subject Post"). On information and belief it is alleged that NEWSWEEK copied the Subject Photograph from Plaintiff's Instagram page and then reproduced and displayed said work on its own website (alongside advertisements from, inter alia, Amazon Prime and the New York Times). NEWSWEEK at no times had Plaintiff's consent to exploit and monetize his original work in this manner.

11. On April 3, 2019, Plaintiff sent a cease and desist letter to NEWSWEEK providing notice of the infringement and requesting NEWSWEEK take down the Subject Photograph. As of October 13, 2019, the Subject Post was still live and online at, including without limitation, the following site:

<https://www.newsweek.com/death-valley-lake-california-flooding-rain-winter-storm-1362695>

12. A true and correct image of the Subject Post and/or the URLs for the Subject Post are attached hereto as **Exhibit A**. These examples reflect a non-exhaustive series of uses and addresses at which NEWSWEEK published the various Subject Photograph without authorization.

13. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, posted, hosted, displayed and distributed the Subject Photograph without Plaintiff's permission.

**FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

(For Copyright Infringement – Against all Defendants, and Each)

14. Plaintiff repeats, re-alleges, and incorporates herein by reference as though fully set forth, the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs of this Complaint.

15. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, had access to the Subject Photograph, including, without limitation, through (a) viewing the Subject Photographs on Plaintiff's social media profiles, (b) viewing Plaintiff's website, (c) viewing Subject Photographs online, and (d) viewing Subject Photographs through a third party. Plaintiff further alleges that the identical nature of the copying establishes access.

16. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, used and distributed images that were unauthorized copies of the Subject Photograph, and exploited said photography online and in productions.

17. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, infringed Plaintiff's copyrights by creating infringing derivative works from the Subject Photograph and by publishing and displaying the

infringing material to the public, including without limitation, through its website or elsewhere.

18. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, infringed Plaintiff's rights by copying the Subject Photograph without Plaintiff's authorization or consent.

19. Due to Defendants', and each of their, acts of infringement, Plaintiff has suffered general and special damages in an amount to be established at trial.

20. Due to Defendants' acts of copyright infringement as alleged herein, Defendants, and each of them, have obtained direct and indirect profits they would not otherwise have realized but for their infringement of Plaintiff's rights in the Subject Photograph. As such, Plaintiff is entitled to disgorgement of Defendants' profits directly and indirectly attributable to Defendants' infringement of Plaintiff's rights in the Subject Photograph in an amount to be established at trial.

21. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, have committed acts of copyright infringement, as alleged above, which were willful, intentional and malicious, which further subjects Defendants, and each of them, to liability for statutory damages under Section 504(c)(2) of the Copyright Act in the sum of up to one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000.00) per infringement and/or a preclusion from asserting certain equitable and other defenses.

### **SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

(For Vicarious and/or Contributory Copyright Infringement – Against all Defendants, and Each)

22. Plaintiff repeats, re-alleges, and incorporates herein by reference as though fully set forth, the allegations contained in the preceding paragraphs of this Complaint.

23. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants knowingly induced, participated in, aided and abetted in and profited from the illegal reproduction and distribution of the Subject Photograph as alleged hereinabove. Such conduct included, without limitation, publishing photographs obtained from third parties that NEWSWEEK knew, or should have known, were not authorized to be published by NEWSWEEK.

24. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, are vicariously liable for the infringement alleged herein because they had the right and ability to supervise the infringing conduct and because they had a direct financial interest in the infringing conduct. Specifically, Defendants, and each of them, received revenue in connection with the posts that incorporated the unauthorized copies of the Subject Photograph, and were able to supervise the publication of said posts.

25. By reason of the Defendants', and each of their, acts of contributory and vicarious infringement as alleged above, Plaintiff has suffered and will continue to suffer substantial damages to their business in an amount to be established at trial, as well as additional general and special damages in an amount to be established at trial.

26. Due to Defendants' acts of copyright infringement as alleged herein, Defendants, and each of them, have obtained direct and indirect profits they would not otherwise have realized but for their infringement of Plaintiff's rights in the Subject Photograph. As such, Plaintiff is entitled to disgorgement of Defendants' profits directly and indirectly attributable to Defendants' infringement of their rights in the Subject Photograph, in an amount to be established at trial.

27. Plaintiff is informed and believes and thereon alleges that Defendants, and each of them, have committed acts of copyright infringement, as alleged above, which were willful, intentional and malicious, which further subjects

Defendants, and each of them, to liability for statutory damages under Section 504(c)(2) of the Copyright Act in the sum of up to one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000.00) per infringement and/or a preclusion from asserting certain equitable and other defenses.

**PRAAYER FOR RELIEF**

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for judgment as follows:

**Against all Defendants, and Each:**

**With Respect to Each Claim for Relief:**

- a. That Defendants, and each of them, as well as their employees, agents, or anyone acting in concert with them, be enjoined from infringing Plaintiff's copyrights in the Subject Photograph, including without limitation an order requiring Defendants, and each of them, to remove any content incorporating, in whole or in part, the Subject Photograph from any print, web, or other publication owned, operated, or controlled by any Defendant.
- b. That Plaintiff be awarded all profits of Defendants, and each of them, plus all losses of Plaintiff, plus any other monetary advantage gained by the Defendants, and each of them, through their infringement, the exact sum to be proven at the time of trial, and, to the extent available, statutory damages as available under the 17 U.S.C. § 504 and other applicable law.
- c. That a constructive trust be entered over any revenues or other proceeds realized by Defendants, and each of them, through their infringement of Plaintiff's intellectual property rights;
- d. That Plaintiff be awarded his attorneys' fees as available under the Copyright Act U.S.C. § 505 et seq.;
- e. That Plaintiff be awarded their costs and fees under the above statutes;

- f. That Plaintiff be awarded statutory and enhanced damages under the statutes set forth above;
- g. That Plaintiff be awarded pre-judgment interest as allowed by law;
- h. That Plaintiff be awarded the costs of this action; and
- i. That Plaintiff be awarded such further legal and equitable relief as the Court deems proper.

Plaintiff demands a jury trial on all issues so triable pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 38 and the 7<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: October 17, 2019

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**EXHIBIT A**

**Subject Photograph:**



**Subject Post:**

A screenshot of a news article from Newsweek.com. The URL in the address bar is newsweek.com/death-valley-lake-california-flooding-rain-winter-storm-1362695. The page title is "Death Valley Lake California Flooding Rain Winter Storm". The main content starts with: "McGucken said park officials told him the lake appeared to reach a length of about 10 miles at its peak. But they didn't know exactly how large the body of water had stretched. Although the water was still there Tuesday, the lake is reportedly shrinking." Below the text is a photo of the same lake scene as the subject photograph. On the right side of the page, there is a sponsored advertisement for "Savor a Brothless Ramen" featuring a bowl of ramen. At the bottom right, there is a pop-up window for "SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER" with a "SIGN UP >" button. The bottom of the page has a blue footer with the Amazon Prime logo.